

Missouri Theater
713-715 Edmond Street
St. Joseph
Buchanan County
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1847

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11-SASOE,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MISSOURI THEATER

HABS No. MO-1847

Location: 713-715 Edmond Street, St. Joseph, Buchanan County, Missouri

Present Owner: City of St. Joseph

Present Use: Used approximately 150 nights per year as a center for the performing arts. Major tenants include the St. Joseph Symphony Orchestra, the Performing Arts Association, and the Robidoux Resident Theater. The adjoining Missouri Theater Building contains offices for these organizations, shops, and other functions.

Significance: Building has regional significance as an example of the sumptuous interiors used in theaters in the 1920's. The building has played a part in St. Joseph's downtown entertainment scene first as a movie and vaudeville house, and currently as a resource for active civic organizations.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1927
2. Architect: Boller Brothers, Kansas City, Missouri
3. Original and Subsequent Owners:
Joseph Goldman
Capital Building Company of Lincoln, Nebraska
City of St. Joseph
4. General Contractor: W.J. Assenmacher Company of Lincoln, Nebraska
5. Alterations:
 - 1947: Concessions stand installed in foyer
 - 1960: Loge and lobby renovation and installation of new seating
 - 1960's: Removal of original marquees, art glass and parapet decoration from primary facade; shop fronts on Missouri Theatre Building altered

Date unknown, during 1960's:

Decorative murals in auditorium which showed views of ancient Persopolis painted over

Doors which originally connected the theater and the neighboring theater building at the orchestra and mezzanine levels blocked

Wurlitzer pipe organ removed

- B. Historical context: This building is an example of the 1920's movie and vaudeville palace which graced many cities in the pre-television era. From the time of its opening in 1927 until after World War II, when the entertainment center of St. Joseph moved to the eastern suburbs, many considered the Missouri Theater the prime first-run movie house in town. Built for silent movies, the theater originally had a large Wurlitzer pipe organ used to accompany movies and live stage shows.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Missouri Theater faces south and measures 76 feet, 6 inches on the north-south axis, and 139 feet 9 inches on the east west axis. The primary exterior facade stresses verticality and symmetry; it is vaguely Moorish, due to the repeated horse-shoe arches. This exterior detail is of terra cotta. Removal of the marquees and art glass has somewhat diminished the original effect.

The spectator enters through a lobby which sports variegated turquoise, buff, brown, and maroon tiles. The auditorium of the Missouri Theater depicts a courtyard-like space. A molded plaster ceiling in the shape of a tent canopy caps the interior; this canopy appears to be suspended from huge ropes, also of plaster. The ceiling behind is dark blue with painted clouds. Decoration in the auditorium, which seats 1600, borrows freely from the art of ancient Persia, Babylon, and Assyria. Colors used include buff, pale green, pink, and taupe.

Although constructed primarily as a movie house, the building also has ample provisions for stage productions. The stage is 52 feet wide by 28 feet deep; also included are five dressing rooms, an orchestra pit for a forty piece orchestra, a fly gallery with 44 counterweighted lines, and a control board for house and stage lights.

The two-story Missouri Theater Building abuts the Missouri Theater to the east and measures 63 feet 6 inches on the north-south axis by 139 feet 9 inches on the east-west axis. The Theater Building has a brick and terra cotta facade. Currently it houses offices for local arts organizations as well as several shops.

Sources: National Register nomination form, "Missouri Theater and Theater Building," compiled by Noelle Soren, 1979

Telephone conversation with a representative of the St. Joseph Chamber of Commerce, July 7, 1988

Telephone conversation with the manager of the Missouri Theater, July 7, 1988

Historian: Robert Buerglener, HABS, July 8, 1988

ADDENDUM TO
MISSOURI THEATER BUILDING
713-715 Edmond Street
Saint Joseph
Buchanan County
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1847

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